

NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
Office of Archives and History
Department of Cultural Resources

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Blair Farm

Boone vicinity, Watauga County, WT0071, Listed 8/29/2008

Nomination by Heather Fearnbach

Photographs by Heather Fearnbach, July 2006



Overall front view



Overall rear view



Smokehouse



Carriagehouse

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Blair Farm

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number North side of Deerfield Road (SR 1522) just west of its junction with Blairmont Drive **N/A** not for publication

city or town Boone **X** vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Watauga code 189 zip code 28607

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

☐ entered in the National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined eligible for the National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.

☐ removed from the National Register.

☐ other,

(explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Blair Farm
Name of Property

Watauga County, NC
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
4	1	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
4	1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

AGRICULTURE: Agricultural Outbuilding

AGRICULTURE: Processing

AGRICULTURE: Storage

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Hall-parlor house

Mid-nineteenth century

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls WOOD: Weatherboard

roof METAL

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Art

Architecture

Period of Significance

1844, circa 1850s, circa 1880s, circa 1900

Significant Dates

1844, circa 1850s, circa 1880s, circa 1900

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State Agency
- ☐ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

Blair Farm
Name of Property

Watauga County, NC
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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 9.1 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 17 441720 4006440
Zone Easting Northing
2

3
Zone Easting Northing
4

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Heather Fearnbach
organization Edwards-Pitman Environmental, Inc. date 9/11/2007
street & number 3334 Nottingham Road telephone 336-765-6551
city or town Winston-Salem state NC zip code 27104

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Byron and Sharon Blair Tolbert
street & number 1882 Cove Mountain Lane telephone 828-850-7034
city or town Lenoir state NC zip code 28645

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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7. Narrative Description

Setting

Blair Farm is located on the north side of Deerfield Road (SR 1522) just west of its junction with Blairmont Drive. Although the farm once encompassed hundreds of rural acres southeast of Boone, the residual 9.1 acre-tract has now been incorporated into Boone town limits. As is the case with all mountain farms, Blair Farm's layout conforms to the natural topography. The house faces south and is situated on a slight rise above the East Fork of the New River, which winds along the property's southwest boundary. Deciduous and evergreen trees including oak, maple, cedar, and hemlock occupy the grass-covered yard. A privet hedge along the eastern property line screens the house from the adjacent Blairmont subdivision. A few wild cherry and apple trees on the tax parcel east of the hedge are the remnants of the Blair Farm orchard. A gravel drive enters the property west of the residence and continues north past the carriage house and granary/wood shed. A mid-twentieth-century stone retaining wall extends along the southeastern portion of the driveway at Deerfield Road; two stone posts of the same vintage are on the north side of the retaining wall. A log smokehouse stands to the rear (north) of the Blair House, and a small creek runs behind the smokehouse and toward the river, separating the domestic complex from an unpaved farm road, cultivated fields, and a wooded hill.

Until the mid-twentieth century, Boone Township was quite rural—characterized by rolling hills and farms located in the fertile land adjacent to the New River and its tributaries. However, Appalachian State University campus expansion, rapid population growth, and the explosion in Watauga County tourism dramatically transformed the landscape during the second half of the twentieth century. Blair Farm, the oldest of only a few nineteenth-century buildings remaining in Boone, is now surrounded by recreational, civic, and residential development, but remains somewhat isolated from the new construction due to the size of its tax parcel and the wooded areas lining the perimeter of the property. The pastoral landscaping of the Boone Golf Course, just south of Blair Farm across Deerfield Road, is not incongruous with that portion of the farm's historic appearance.

Blair House

1844, circa 1850s, circa 1880s, circa 1900, 1938, late 1950s-early 1960s
Contributing Building

The Blair House is a one-and-one-half-story, single-pile, side-gable-roofed, timber-frame dwelling with a full-height rear gabled ell. A large central gable and two flanking clipped-gable dormers ornamented with decorative wood shingles dominate the asymmetrical five-bay façade. The full-width, engaged, enclosed front porch shelters two front doors, which lead into the two rooms of the original hall-parlor plan house.

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A small, one-story, gabled addition on the northwest end of the rear ell includes an enclosed porch at the kitchen's west entrance and a storage room (originally a springhouse). The enclosed wraparound porch on the northeast elevation encompasses another storage room, the bathroom, a hall, and two bedrooms.

Two single-shouldered brick chimneys with fieldstone bases and reconstructed brick stacks stand at the gable ends of the original house; the circa 1850s addition extends beyond the western chimney. A central brick chimney serves the rear ell. The building rests on a mid-twentieth-century concrete block foundation, but portions of a continuous stone foundation and interior stone piers remain under the house. A standing-seam metal roof replaced the original wood shingle roof in 1938.¹

Like most vernacular farmhouses, the Blair House evolved according to the needs and economic success of the inhabitants. The Blairs were unusually fortunate, however, in that Henry Blair was a skilled carpenter, and was thus able to add onto the house himself as time and finances allowed. The Blair House initially consisted of a modest hall-parlor plan dwelling with an unfinished upstairs loft. The location of an early stair or ladder to the loft is unclear, as Henry's carpentry skills have carefully disguised any evidence of this feature. He constructed an additional room on the west end of the house not long after the completion of the original dwelling, and the two-room (kitchen/dining room) rear ell soon followed. A tight, winding, enclosed stair in the southeast corner of the ell's central room leads to the upper floor. Sometime in the late nineteenth century, probably in the 1880s after Henry's son George purchased the farm and married for the second time, the Blairs changed the roof pitch, added a central gable and dormers, finished two rooms on the upper floor, and enclosed the southern section of the wraparound rear porch to create two additional bedrooms. The porch area adjacent to the dining room ell was left open to the storage room at the north end. Neal Blair's daughter Mary George Blair Youngblood remembers that the family used the rear porch's open section, which was eventually screened-in, as a supplemental dining area through the 1930s. The porch was completely enclosed to create a bathroom and hallway in the summer of 1940.²

Although most of the weatherboards on the north, east, and west elevations of the house date to the circa 1880s remodeling, the flush board sheathing under the front porch (secured with cut nails) appears to be original. The porch's west sill was replaced, the front and east elevations screened, and glass windows installed on the west elevation in 1938 (the Blairs etched the date in concrete on the porch foundation), but the family saved the early sawnwork porch posts and turned balustrades, storing them above the

¹ Mary George Blair Youngblood, correspondence with the author, September 11, 2007.

² Ibid.; Sharon Blair Tolbert, email correspondence with the author, September 5, 2007. The Blairs ate on the porch in fair weather or when it was too hot to eat in the kitchen due to the heat produced by the cook stove. Sharon Blair Tolbert, telephone conversation with Mary George Blair Youngblood, April 11, 2008.

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carriage house ceiling joists. Blair family photos illustrate that the front porch was still screened-in as late as 1959, but the front porch was completely enclosed with grouped windows above a weatherboard kneewall in the 1960s. Simple wooden replacement steps lead to doors on the porch's front (south) and east elevations.

A combination of window sash dating from all construction periods illuminate the house's interior. Original nine-over-six windows remain on the façade and some replacement four-over-four sash flank the chimney on the east elevation. The circa 1850s west addition and rear ell, and the 1880s central gable, gabled dormers, storeroom, and enclosed bedrooms on the rear porch also have four-over-four sash. The clipped-gable dormers on the front roof slope have two-over-two sash. Early- to mid-twentieth-century windows were used in the enclosures of the northwest corner porch (circa 1930s), the rear porch's central section (circa 1940), and the front porch (circa 1960s).

The interior of the house also reflects a series of additions and changes. Flush boards, which were decoratively painted around the turn of the twentieth century, sheath the walls and ceilings. Painted pine floors, tall baseboards with a beaded upper edge, flat board door and window surrounds (some of which were later embellished with applied moldings on the outer edge), narrow crown moldings, raised two- and four-panel doors, and vernacular mantels characterize the interior. The three mantels in the main block display a Classical influence, with the mantel in the largest, central room (originally the hall, now the parlor) being the most elaborate. The parlor mantel's focal point is a square central panel with a gouged sunburst motif inside a recessed circle within a larger square. A molded shelf and truncated colonettes above slender Ionic pilasters on stepped plinths complete the mantel composition. The east room mantel has a molded shelf above a raised central panel with a bell-shaped lower edge. Applied trim molding and fluted pilasters surround the firebox. The west room mantel consists of fluted pilasters on plinths below a pointed-arch lintel and molded shelf. The post-and-lintel dining room mantel is completely devoid of embellishment.

The Blairs enclosed the dining room, west room, parlor, and east room fireplaces during the winter months and installed small wood heaters. They removed and stored the heaters and used the fireplaces as needed during the summer months through the 1940s. By the late 1950s, oil circulator heaters replaced the wood heaters, first in the dining room and then in the west room, parlor, and kitchen. Henry Neal Blair Jr. removed the oil circulator heaters between 1980 and 1990. The Tolberts installed a wood stove in the dining room in the fall of 2005. A built-in dining room cupboard with four raised-panel doors occupies the wall cavity west of the chimney that serves the kitchen and dining room fireplaces. The kitchen walls were covered with drywall during an early 1960s remodeling, which also included the replacement of the floor system (joists and subfloor), installation of cabinets and a linoleum floor, and the construction of a washer-dryer closet in the southwest corner. The kitchen renovation was completed by

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1964, when a dishwasher was installed in preparation for Neal and Martha Blair's fiftieth wedding anniversary party.³

Recent drywall removal exposed a twenty-four-inch-deep kitchen firebox with a parged surround. Mary George Blair Youngblood remembers that the family cooked in the fireplace and on a woodstove. One of her favorite treats was cake or cornbread cooked in a three-leg iron covered pot with hot ashes on the fireplace hearth. The woodstove sat near the center of the kitchen floor, allowing space for chairs between the fireplace and the woodstove during cold weather. Neal and Martha's grandchildren, Susan and Palmer Blair, watched their grandmother cook on the woodstove until the early 1960s kitchen renovation, when an oil circulator heater replaced the woodstove.⁴

Mary George recalls that the house had electric lights and a telephone line by the late 1890s, but after the local electric plant burned the family went back to using kerosene lamps for light. Electric service was not restored to the area until 1936, first at a filling station at the corner of Deerfield Road and US 321, and then at local residences by 1938, after Neal and Martha Blair encouraged their neighbors to "welcome" the Rural Electrification Authority.⁵

According to Mary George, the porch at the kitchen's west entrance was enclosed in the mid-1930s, creating a small vestibule between the kitchen and the springhouse/storage room. A door at the vestibule's north end provided access to the springhouse/storage room. Cold spring water flowed from a pipe in the room's east wall to a race along the north elevation and then out through a pipe in the west elevation to a horse trough, which emptied into the creek, or "branch." The race's bottom was graduated to accommodate different-sized vessels. As the room was always the coolest place in the house, perishable food was also stored on shelves lining the walls and in a built-in screened pie safe.⁶ Sharon Blair Tolbert remembers that the race was still in use during her childhood in the 1950s, as she accompanied Martha Blair (her grandmother) to retrieve items out of the water. She recalls that several steps led down to the room's dirt floor. Sharon's brother, Palmer Blair, remembers that the race was about eighteen inches wide and constructed of thick hewn boards. Windows on the east and west elevations illuminated the space. The springhouse race was enclosed during the 1960s kitchen

³ Sharon Blair Tolbert, conversation with the author, September 9, 2007; Sharon Blair Tolbert, telephone conversations with Mary George Blair Youngblood, April 11, 2008 and Sarah Lynn Rives Spencer on April 12, 2008.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.; Mary George Blair Youngblood, correspondence with the author, September 11, 2007.

⁶ Mary George Blair Youngblood, correspondence with the author, September 11, 2007.

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remodeling, the pie safe removed, and the current floor, walls, and shelving installed, but the room continues to function as storage space.⁷

Recent restoration efforts have led to the discovery of elaborate interior painting throughout the first floor interior. The ceiling in the main block's central room, which had been covered with wallpaper, was the first to be exposed. The decoratively painted walls and ceilings in the other rooms were not initially visible, as the Blairs painted over them with Kalkomo, an "artistic wall finish" produced by Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, in the 1930s. The walls were later papered in some cases, and covered with drywall in others. Kalkomo is, fortunately, a water-soluble finish, and current owners Byron and Sharon Blair Tolbert, other family members, and Appalachian State University student volunteers have spent months carefully washing off the Kalkomo paint layer after removing drywall and wallpaper. The decorative painting on the mantels, baseboards, and doors cannot be completely exposed, as these elements have been coated with oil-based paint. Test scraping in a few areas has revealed that most of the window mullions and doors were painted dark brown, and that some interior window and door trim was painted bright green.

According to family tradition, an itinerant painter whose name has been long forgotten boarded with the Blairs for some months one winter around the turn of the twentieth century and executed the decorative painting, which encompasses a variety of stencil and freehand techniques.⁸ Although commercially-produced stencils were available through trade catalogs at this time, the Blair family recalls that the artist cut his own stencils and shaped wooden spools to use as stamps, and that George Henry and Mary Adelaide Blair's daughter Florence, who later became a professional painter, may have assisted him with some of the painting.

The parlor has an elaborately-painted ceiling, wall frieze, and overmantel, befitting the room's function as the house's principal public space. Most of the ceiling design—a center medallion with four radiating paths that extend to an outer border, dividing the ceiling into four quadrants—is stenciled, but some elements are painted freehand, and the quadrant fields are smoked, a technique achieved when painters waved "a lighted torch, pine knot, or kerosene lamp across wet paint so that the smoke created a marbled

⁷ Sharon Blair Tolbert, email correspondence with the author, September 18, 2007; Sharon Blair Tolbert, telephone conversation with Palmer Blair, April 17, 2008.

⁸ Recent wallpaper removal in the east shed porch bedroom revealed a signature, which could be the itinerant painter's, on the room's south wall. The handwriting is difficult to make out, but the name appears to be "Copelyze."

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effect on the paint surface.”⁹ Neal Blair told his children that the painter used a “short lamp” with the “chimney taken off” to smoke the ceiling.¹⁰ The outer border and radiating paths have bright blue fields with black borders and gold crescent and diamond stenciling along the edges. Freehand black outlines emphasize the top two edges of each diamond, and two freehand gold dots extend from each diamond’s point. The blue band around the center medallion continues this motif along its outer edge. The inner edge ornamentation—a gold stenciled stylized filigree motif accented with black infill at regular intervals—is also embellished with two gold freehand dots at each projection. The center medallion, outlined in black, consists of a green field; a ring of red, yellow, and light green trompe l’oeil panels; a band of freehand gold flowers and black vines; and a bright blue circle outlined in black with a central red and yellow compass rose. A gas chandelier originally hung from the center of the compass rose, but in the late 1930s Carolyn Blair purchased the electric fixture with a porcelain globe and shade and crystal prisms that currently hangs in this location.

The parlor’s walls are not as elaborately finished as the ceiling. The painter used an extended version of the gold stenciled stylized filigree motif around the ceiling’s central medallion to embellish the tall frieze, which has a red field above a black border. Gold balls hang from each projection, replacing the two freehand dots used elsewhere. The lower portion of the walls is painted deep mustard yellow.

The most striking element of the parlor’s paint scheme is the mural above the mantel. A red trompe l’oeil arch frames the coastal scene, and the craggy cliff in the upper left quadrant provides the backdrop for a two-story white dwelling with a blue hip roof and a rear shed addition. A large log barn stands to the left of the house. A white post-and-rail fence borders the domestic complex, which is situated on a grassy hill above a bay. A sailing vessel is barely visible on the horizon in the painting’s upper right quadrant. A yellow stone building—perhaps a church—with a front-gable-roof, crenellated parapet, and triangular three-part parapet topped by a tall spire, is perched on a rocky outcropping that extends into the bay from the mural’s right side. Mountains, rolling grassy hills, and trees frame the bay in the foreground.

The itinerant artist incorporated another faux finishing technique—stone blocking—in the dining room, where he painted the lower two-thirds of each wall a light brownish-gold with deep blue-green-outlined blocks and veins to emulate stone. The upper third is essentially a tall frieze with black bands at the top and bottom. The frieze contains a red field, gold crescent and diamond stenciling around the upper and lower edges, and a series of trompe l’oeil panels with simplistically executed mountain scenes in mitered

⁹ Laura A. W. Phillips, “Grand Illusions: Decorative Interior Painting in North Carolina,” in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, IV*, ed. Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 158.

¹⁰ Sharon Blair Tolbert, telephone conversation with Mary George Blair Youngblood, April 11, 2008.

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frames. Gold-outlined panels with a central gold fruit, yellow leaf, and black vine motif separate the scenic panels. The coastal landscape mural over the mantel has been damaged by the installation of a stovepipe, but much of the painting, including ships in a bay in the upper portion and a modest dwelling nestled in a hill at the bottom right corner, is intact. The dining room ceiling does not have a central medallion, but the blue-green paint was smoked all over, creating a marbled effect.

The west room wall paint scheme consists of a brown field and a gold stenciled stylized filigree motif frieze. Portions of the filigree motif are accented with black infill. Painted gold pendants, which resemble acorns, hang from each projection, followed by two gold freehand dots. The ceiling's green center is outlined with double black lines; the outer band is greenish-gold, with a red stylized stenciled motif extending along the edges. Two black freehand dots punctuate each projection.

The painter used the crescent and diamond stencil in three bedrooms, with a variety of color schemes. The east room has green walls with a red crescent and diamond pattern stenciled around the cornice and the ceiling's outer edge. Two red freehand dots extend from each diamond's point. The two bedrooms on the enclosed rear porch are more simply finished, with the crescent and diamond pattern stenciled in dark green on a yellow field around the cornice of one room, and dark green on a light green field in the other. Two green freehand dots extend from each diamond's point.

A tight, winding, enclosed stair in the southeast corner of the dining room leads to the upper floor. Two steps rise to the board-and-batten door. Inside the stair enclosure unpainted flush boards attached with cut nails sheath the first-story portion of the wall; the stair treads and risers are also secured with cut nails. A simple square newel post and balusters stand at the top of the stair well. The upper floor was enlarged by a change in the roof pitch in the late nineteenth century, resulting in a large unfinished attic space above the original hall-parlor section of the house, and two bedrooms separated by a stairhall above the main block's west room and the dining room in the ell. The walls and ceilings of the bedrooms and hall are covered with unpainted pine beadboard attached with wire nails. Raised-four-panel doors retain original hinges and cast-iron rim locks with porcelain knobs. A short two-panel door provides access to the attic on the east wall of the southwest bedroom. The construction of the northwest bedroom's north wall made access to the kitchen attic from the upper floor impossible; an enclosed stair in the kitchen's northwest corner allowed for access to this storage area until the late 1950s, when the enclosed stair was removed during the kitchen remodeling. A portion of the northwest bedroom's north wall was removed in 2007 to provide access to the kitchen attic.

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Additional Resources

Three contributing buildings—a carriage house, granary/wood shed, and smokehouse—and one noncontributing privy complete the outbuilding assemblage on the Blair Farm property. The inventory starts west of the house and moves north and then east. No-longer-extant resources depicted in historic photos include a large, gable-roofed, frame barn that stood northwest of the carriage house; a smaller, side-gable-roofed frame outbuilding southwest of the barn; a small frame gabled outbuilding northwest of the house; a large gabled frame food storage building (demolished in the 1960s) north of the house; a large side-gable-roofed log wash house east of the house; and an extensive system of post-and-rail, picket, and split-rail fences.¹¹ Mary George Blair Youngblood remembers that another frame privy (designated for use by the women of the family) stood northeast of the house; a chicken house, hog pen, and milking lot were north of the house; one tenant house was northeast of the Blair's domestic complex (on property now encompassed by Blairmont subdivision); and a second tenant house was even further northeast at the base of Yarnal Mountain. She also recalls that the "State of North Carolina," probably the North Carolina Emergency Relief Administration, constructed two additional frame privies for the family around 1934. The area south of the house (now the Boone Golf Course) was planted in hay and cultivated fields extended to the north, east, and west.¹²

Granary/Wood Shed **mid-nineteenth century, tool shed addition circa 1890s** **Contributing Building**

A one-and-one-half-story, front-gable-roofed, frame granary/wood shed is located west of the house. A metal roof shelters the building, which rests on stone piers. Horizontal weatherboards secured with cut nails sheath the gable ends; the north, east, and south elevations of the first story are open, with braced timber posts supporting the upper floor. Remnants of a corncrib are visible at the southwest corner. The remainder of the first story has a gravel floor and serves as open storage. Wide, vertical board siding covers the enclosed stair, which rises to the west from the northeast corner. The upper floor has a wood floor, large grain bins lining the side walls, and nine-over-six sash in the gable ends. Linda Blair Byrd

¹¹ Palmer Blair remembers that the large frame food storage building, which he calls the "icehouse" was built into the side of the hill across the creek and had one-foot-deep walls filled with sawdust. Mary George Blair Youngblood remembers this building being called the "warehouse," and that it had double doors for insulation, as it was used to store cabbage, potatoes, glass jars of canned goods, barrels of vinegar, and other foodstuffs. Sharon Blair Tolbert, telephone conversations with Mary George Blair Youngblood on April 11, 2008 and Palmer Blair on April 17, 2008.

¹² Sharon Blair Tolbert, conversation with the author, September 9, 2007; Mary George Blair Youngblood, correspondence with the author, September 11, 2007; Sharon Blair Tolbert, telephone conversation with Mary George Blair Youngblood, September 17, 2007.

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had some of the wide end boards from the bins on the east side of the central walkway removed in September 2004.

The Blairs added a weatherboarded tool shed to the granary/wood shed's west elevation in the 1890s. A board-and-batten door on the south elevation and a wide double-leaf door on the north elevation provide access to the shed, which is currently used for storage. Five small, square, four-pane windows on the west elevation illuminate the interior. One additional window near the west elevation's north end has been enclosed.

Carriage House

mid-nineteenth century, rear addition late nineteenth century, shed additions 1890s
Contributing Building

A one-story, front-gable-roofed, frame carriage house is located west of the house and granary/wood shed. The building has heavy hewn sills (some of which may have been reused from an earlier building) and circular-sawn joists, framing members, and weatherboards secured with wire nails. An approximately twenty-foot section was added to the rear (west end) of the main block in the late nineteenth century and shed additions constructed on the north and south elevations in the 1890s. Temporary plywood doors secure the main block's east elevation; the north elevation is open. A large board-and-batten door serves as the east wall of the north shed; the south shed is open on both ends and two small square window openings in the south elevation have been boarded up. A metal roof shelters the building, which rests on stone piers. The main block and north shed are currently used for storage; the flooring in the south shed has been removed.

Privy

second quarter of the twentieth century
Noncontributing Building

A privy with a metal shed roof and vertical board siding stands north of the carriage house. Remnants of a board-and-batten door hang from one hinge at the door opening on the east elevation; the interior contains a wooden bench with two seats. The building is partially buried in a mound of fill dirt. According to Mary George Blair Youngblood, farm workers and the men of the family utilized this privy. The no longer extant women's privy, located northeast of the house near the creek, had four seats (including one small children's seat) and was surrounded by apple trees. Mary George also recalls that the "State of North Carolina," probably the North Carolina Emergency Relief Administration, constructed

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two additional frame privies for the family around 1934. One stood north of the house (across the creek) and the other to the east of the house in the apple orchard.¹³

Smokehouse
mid-nineteenth century
Contributing Building

A one-story, gable-roofed, dovetail-notched log smokehouse is located north of the Blair House. Wood siding sheaths the gable ends; a board-and-batten door on the south elevation provides access to the interior. The door turns on wood hinges and was originally secured with a wooden box lock. Meat hung from the rafters at one time; the shelves mounted on the outside walls were used to dress and store smaller cuts of meat. George Henry Blair applied a brown sugar and salt mixture to cure his hams.¹⁴ A standing-seam metal roof shelters the smokehouse, which rested on stone piers but now sits at grade. Sharon Blair Tolbert remembers that a large bell was mounted on the smokehouse's south gable until the late 1980s. Neal Blair, her grandfather, told the children that the bell was only to be rung if there was trouble (such as a fire) on the farm and/or the family needed help.¹⁵

¹³ Mary George Blair Youngblood, correspondence with the author, September 11, 2007; Sharon Blair Tolbert, telephone conversation with Mary George Blair Youngblood, September 17, 2007. The North Carolina Emergency Relief Administration spent \$12,490.37 on Watauga County privy construction between 1932 and 1935. J. S. Kirk, Walter A. Cutter, and Thomas W. Morse, eds., *Emergency Relief in North Carolina: A Record of the Development and Activities of the North Carolina Emergency Relief Administration, 1932-1935* (Raleigh: North Carolina Emergency Relief Administration, 1936), 531.

¹⁴ Mary George Blair Youngblood, correspondence with the author, September 11, 2007.

¹⁵ Sharon Blair Tolbert, email correspondence with the author, September 18, 2007.

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8. Statement of Significance

Summary Statement

Blair Farm meets National Register Criterion C for its local architectural significance as a largely intact example of a mid-nineteenth-century Watauga County farmhouse—the oldest of only a few nineteenth-century buildings remaining in Boone—and associated outbuildings. Henry Blair built the house in 1844 on land he purchased from his brother Colbert, and five generations of the Blair family have utilized the dwelling. As originally constructed, the one-story, single-pile residence had a hall-parlor plan and end chimneys. Building fabric suggests that Henry Blair, who was a skilled carpenter, enlarged the house by adding a room on the west end not long after the completion of the original dwelling, and the rear ell soon followed. Sometime in the late nineteenth century, probably in the 1880s after Henry's son George purchased the farm and married for the second time, the Blairs changed the roof pitch, added a central gable and dormers, finished two rooms on the upper floor, and enclosed the southern portion of the wraparound rear porch to allow for more living space. Extensive decorative interior painting completed around the turn of the twentieth century in six first floor rooms further distinguishes the Blair House from Watauga County's other extant mid-nineteenth-century dwellings and meets National Register Criterion C for art. The extant outbuildings on Blair Farm—a log smokehouse, a frame granary/wood shed, and a frame carriage house—were built in the vernacular tradition of western North Carolina farm buildings, utilizing readily available materials and basic framing techniques. The period of significance for Blair Farm begins circa 1844, when the house was constructed, and includes the circa 1850 and circa 1880 additions and modifications as well as the circa 1900 decorative interior painting.

Historical Background

Discerning the Blair family's early history is difficult due to the nebulous and often conflicting nature of early genealogical records. It appears that the English ancestors of the Watauga County Blairs immigrated to Virginia in the early seventeenth century, moved to Pennsylvania by the late seventeenth century, were resettled in Virginia by the mid eighteenth century, and then migrated south to North Carolina in the late eighteenth century. John Blair (1764-1846) and his wife Frances Hill (1768-1853) were married in Randolph County, North Carolina around 1782, and moved west to what is now Caldwell County soon after. John and Frances had fourteen children—James, Thomas, William, Colbert, Mary, Henry, John, Morgan, Elijah, Elizabeth, Francis, Enos, Sallie, and Elias—from 1782 through the 1820s.¹⁶

¹⁶ John Preston Arthur, *A History of Watauga County, North Carolina* (Richmond: Everett Waddey Co., 1915), 287; "John Blair," OneWorldTree, ancestry.com, accessed on August 13, 2007; Gene Blair, "Some Descendants of James and Mary Colbert Blair," printouts from database dated August 7, 1995 in the possession of Sharon Blair Tolbert.

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John and Frances Blair's son Henry (1806-1891) married Mary Steele (1806-1890) on June 28, 1832.¹⁷ The young couple initially lived in Little River (approximately eight miles from present-day Lenoir) but moved northwest to what was then Ashe County in 1846.¹⁸ Henry had begun working the Ashe County farm a few years earlier, after he purchased 209 acres on the East Fork of the New River from his older brother Colbert for \$500.50 on February 8, 1844.¹⁹ According to family tradition, he started constructing a dwelling on his newly acquired acreage that year, a fact commemorated by the "1844" date carved in the granite pier at the southwest corner of the Blair House's front porch.

As the Blairs and other settlers moved to northern Ashe County in the 1840s, state legislators recognized the need for more localized government. They passed a bill creating Watauga County from portions of Ashe, Wilkes, Caldwell, and Yancey Counties on January 27, 1849. At the first county court meeting, justices named commissioners to designate the site of the county seat. They selected Council's Store, a small community named for prosperous early settler Jordan Council, and called the new county seat Boone in 1851 in honor of pioneer Daniel Boone, who hunted and camped in the area during the 1760s.²⁰

Boone's population remained small, however, with the majority of Watauga County residents living on farms. In 1850, 442 farmsteads occupied 17,113 acres of improved land. Farmers grew subsistence crops, raised livestock (pigs, cattle, and sheep), and sold goods including flax, buckwheat, fruit, maple sugar, butter, cheese, beeswax, honey, and wool at local and regional markets.²¹

Like other early Watauga County settlers, the Blair family relied primarily on agriculture for their livelihood. The 1850 census enumerated three adjacent Blair family households headed by forty-three-year-old Henry, sixty-year-old Thomas (Henry's brother), and Thomas's thirty-two-year-old son Carlton.

¹⁷ "Henry Blair," OneWorldTree, www.ancestry.com, accessed on August 13, 2007.

¹⁸ Sharon Blair Tolbert and Byron Tolbert, "The Blair Farm, 1835-2004," Proposed Daniel Boone Parkway Route Impact Comments, NCDOT TIP # U-2703, March 11, 2004, revised April 12, 2006, 8.

¹⁹ Deed Book O, page 208, Office of the Register of Deeds, Ashe County Courthouse, Jefferson, North Carolina. Henry's brothers Colbert and Thomas began acquiring Ashe County property in the 1830s, see Deed Book

²⁰ Tony VanWinkle, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Watauga County, North Carolina, ca. 1763-1952," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 2003, 18.

²¹ Ibid., 19.

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The three men were all farmers; Henry's property was valued at \$1,600 and Thomas's at \$3,000. Carlton must have lived and worked on his father's farm, as the census taker did not record a real estate value for Carlton's household. Henry's family consisted of his wife Mary (43) and their five children: John Culbertson (17), Nancy Rebecca (14), Elijah S. (12), William Morgan (9), James Thompson (7), and George Henry (5). Four slaves resided on the property: a twenty-five-year-old woman, a nine-year-old girl, a seven-year-old girl, and a one-year-old mulatto boy.²²

The 1850 agricultural schedule reports that Henry Blair owned 63 unimproved acres, 146 improved acres, and \$140 worth of farm equipment. His livestock—3 horses, 7 milk cows, 38 other cows, 2 working oxen, 37 sheep, and 35 pigs—was valued at \$526. The farm produced 75 bushels of rye, 150 bushels of Indian corn, 80 bushels of oats, 20 bushels of buckwheat, 5 bushels of sweet potatoes, 5 bushels of Irish potatoes, and 35 tons of hay in the 1849-50 growing season. Beehives on the farm generated 25 pounds of beeswax and honey. Dairy cattle produced milk, which was churned into 210 pounds of butter and 125 pounds of cheese. The annual sheep-shearing yielded 60 pounds of wool. Thomas Blair's farm produced similar amounts of the same field crops; 50 pounds of flax and 2 bushels of flaxseed; 54 pounds of wool; 70 pounds of honey and beeswax; and 220 pounds of butter.²³

In addition to his large farm, Thomas Blair owned saw, grist, and carding mills near the Middle Fork of the New River, and provided great quantities of lumber for Boone's new buildings. Henry Blair's skills complemented his brother's industry, as he was a carpenter as well as a farmer, constructing furniture, wagons, and windmills for his neighbors. In the late 1850s, perhaps in an attempt to subsidize his farm income and create an official venue for the exchange of goods and services he had been informally providing for some time, Henry went into business with local entrepreneur M. T. Cox. The partners opened a store under the name of Cox and Blair on Rutherford Street (now Virgil Street). Henry's son John Culbertson (J. C.) served as the store's chief clerk. Cox also owned a general store in Soda Hill, and, after experiencing a series of financial difficulties, he moved to Arkansas, leaving Henry Blair to pay off the debts of Cox and Blair.²⁴

²² Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Watauga County, North Carolina, Population and Slave Schedules, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (Microfilm of Manuscript Records at the Greensboro and Winston-Salem Public Libraries); "Henry Blair," OneWorldTree, www.ancestry.com, accessed on August 13, 2007.

²³ Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Watauga County, North Carolina, Agriculture Schedule, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (Microfilm of Manuscript Records at the North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

²⁴ "A Sketch of the Life of the Late Henry Blair," *The Lenior Topic*, December 2, 1891; John Preston Arthur, *A History of Watauga County, North Carolina*, 148-149. No references to a store owned by the Blairs appear in *Branson's North Carolina Business Directories* during the last decades of the nineteenth century, so it appears that their store closed around the time of the Civil War. The Blairs are listed as farmers, however, when Watauga County farmers are included in 1877-78 and

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By 1860, the value of Henry Blair's real estate had increased to \$4,000 and his personal estate to \$2,000. His improved acreage, farm equipment, and livestock amounts also increased, as his farm encompassed 1,209 acres, 80 of which were improved; \$300 worth of farm equipment; and 4 horses, 4 milk cows, 7 other cows, 9 working oxen, 20 sheep, and 30 pigs valued at \$836. Overall livestock numbers decreased from 1850 in most cases, but farm production soared. Henry harvested 200 bushels of wheat, 75 bushels of rye, 200 bushels of Indian corn, 500 bushels of oats, 10 pounds of tobacco, 50 bushels of peas and beans, 50 bushels of Irish potatoes, 5 bushels of sweet potatoes, 50 bushels of buckwheat, and 9 tons of hay. The farm orchard yielded fruit valued at \$50. Fewer sheep resulted in a diminished wool yield of 40 pounds. Fewer dairy cattle did not adversely impact the production of butter and cheese, however, which increased to 300 and 200 pounds respectively. Beehives on the property yielded 50 pounds of beeswax and 250 pounds of honey. The farm also produced 50 gallons of molasses. In addition to working the farm, Henry served as the Watauga County Superior Court Clerk, and according to local tradition, joined other Boone residents in panning for gold dust in creeks running down Muster Field Hill to the New River.²⁵

Three of Henry and Mary's sons—Elijah, William, and J. C.—served the Confederate cause in the First Regiment of the North Carolina Calvary during the Civil War. Elijah entered and exited military service as a private. He was captured on April 2, 1865 at Sutherland Station, Virginia, imprisoned in Newport News, Virginia the next day, and released on June 27, 1865. Second Lieutenant William Morgan Blair was wounded and captured during an engagement at Chamberlain Run, Virginia on March 31, 1865. He died at Point of Rocks, Virginia, on April 21, 1865. J. C. had risen to the rank of captain when captured by Northern forces in 1864. He was imprisoned at Fort Delaware on Pea Patch Island, south of Wilmington, Delaware, and moved via steamer to Morris Island in the Charleston harbor in August 1864 along with six hundred other Union Army prisoners, later known as "The Immortal Six Hundred," to be placed in the line of fire in retaliation for a similar Confederate action during the Northern attack on Charleston. After enduring six weeks of starvation rations, the 549 surviving prisoners were moved to Fort Pulaski on Cockspur Island, fifteen miles east of Savannah, Georgia. J. C. was wounded in the shoulder when an African American guard discharged his weapon and the bullet struck a tent post and passed through a tent full of prisoners. The survivors were returned to Fort Delaware in March 1865, and

1884. Levi Branson, *Branson's North Carolina Business Directories* (Raleigh, NC: Levi Branson, Office Publisher, 1877-78, 1884, 1890, 1896).

²⁵ Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Watauga County, North Carolina, Population and Agriculture Schedules, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (Microfilm of Manuscript Records at the Greensboro Public Library and the North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh); John Preston Arthur, *A History of Watauga County, North Carolina*, 133, 263.

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although most were released immediately following the Confederacy's collapse in April, J. C. was detained at Fort Delaware until June 16, 1865. He was unable to work on the family farm upon his return home due to his rheumatism, so he moved to Lenoir to study medicine with Dr. Scroggs, eventually attending Jefferson Medical School in Philadelphia and returning to Lenoir to set up a practice. According to family tradition, Henry Blair sold some of his land to finance J. C.'s education.²⁶

During the Civil War, most southern farmers suffered great economic challenges including substantial losses of material goods, livestock, and labor. These stressors resulted in declining farm values. The Blair farm reflected this trend, as by 1870 the land and farm equipment values had significantly decreased in value, worth only \$1,500 and \$200 respectively according to the census of that year. The agriculture schedule also reports a significant decrease in overall farm acreage (110 improved and 270 wooded acres). Henry Blair owned livestock including 5 horses, 5 dairy and 15 other cows, 2 working oxen, 26 sheep, and 11 pigs valued at \$873; and paid farm laborers \$150 over the course of the year. He harvested a smaller quantity and variety of field crops than in 1860: 150 bushels of rye, 50 bushels of Indian corn, 96 bushels of buckwheat, 50 pounds of tobacco, 50 bushels of Irish potatoes, and 12 tons of hay. Wool yield increased to 20 pounds. In a dramatic departure from 1860, the Blairs reported no fruit, cheese, butter, honey, or beeswax production.²⁷

Ongoing economic difficulties and advancing age most likely precipitated the changes in Blair Farm ownership that began in the 1870s. Henry and Mary Blair sold 128 acres to their youngest son George Henry Blair for \$535 on February 24, 1876. George paid them \$265 for an additional 26.5 acres on February 14, 1880 and \$1,500 for 150 acres on August 31, 1880. Henry and Mary conveyed the remainder of their property to him in a separate deed on the latter date, retaining only a lifetime estate in the family home.²⁸

²⁶ "Elijah S. Blair," "William M. Blair," "John C. Blair," U. S. Civil War Soldiers, 1861-1865, ancestry.com, accessed August 14, 2007; "Elijah S. Blair," "William M. Blair," "John C. Blair," Civil War Research and Genealogy Database, Historical Data Systems, Inc., Kingston, Maryland; "The Body of Dr. Blair is Laid to Rest Sunday," *The Lenoir News*, March 27, 1917; Peter Bridges, "600 Suffer North's POW Cruelty," February 1, 2004, <http://www.aiipowmia.com/inter24/in010204northcruel.html>, accessed on August 14, 2007; Edward H. Blair, Jr., "Dr. John Culbertson Blair," in *The Heritage of Caldwell County, Volume I*, ed. E. Carl Anderson, Jr., and John O. Hawkins (Winston-Salem: Hunter Publishing Company, 1983), 256-257.

²⁷ Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Watauga County, North Carolina, Population and Agriculture Schedules, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (Microfilm of Manuscript Records at the Greensboro Public Library and the North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

²⁸ Deed Book K, Pages 334 and 335, Office of the Register of Deeds, Watauga County Courthouse, Boone, North Carolina.

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The 1880 census reflects that thirty-three-year-old George was successfully operating the family farm, which showed a much higher yield than in 1870. He had been widowed for seven years, as he married Mary E. Council on January 2, 1872, and she died on January 5, 1873 after giving birth to their son, Charles Erwin, on December 19, 1872. In 1880, George was residing in the same household as his seventy-four-year-old parents, seven-year-old son Charlie, and two white domestic servants: thirty-three-year old Bettie Bass, the cook; and seventeen-year-old Thomas W. Storne, a farm laborer. The farm acreage and value increased between 1870 and 1880, by which time the Blairs owned 201 improved and 233 wooded acres, farm buildings, and fences valued at \$4,500; \$225 worth of farm equipment; and livestock valued at \$580 (1 horse, 2 mules, 8 milk cows, 14 other cows, 23 sheep, 21 pigs, and 40 chickens). The Blairs paid farm laborers \$340 in 1879 to assist with the production of 20 bushels of wheat, 285 bushels of Indian corn, 100 bushels of buckwheat, 145 bushels of rye, 30 bushels of Irish potatoes, 50 tons of hay, 75 pounds of wool, 425 pounds of butter, and 150 pounds of cheese. The orchard contained 30 apple trees that yielded 100 bushels of fruit.²⁹

George Henry Blair married Mary Adelaide Rousseau on September 27, 1882, and they subsequently had three children: Julius Rousseau Blair (born August 1, 1883; called J. R.), Henry Neal Blair (born February 21, 1886; called Neal), and Cynthia Florence Blair (born August 21, 1889; called Florence). These happy events were unfortunately soon followed by the loss of George's mother Mary on August 13, 1890, and George's father Henry on November 9, 1891.³⁰ In addition to managing the household during this period, Mary A. Blair served as the first postmaster of the Deerfield Post Office; her appointment ran from November 27, 1885 to October 25, 1886.³¹

Although the Blairs produced most of what they needed on the farm, receipts from the 1890s indicate that George purchased some necessities from local stores. In 1890, he spent \$23.16 on flour, meat, lard, coffee, sugar, syrup, and gingham fabric at M. M. Courtney's general store in Lenoir, and was credited

²⁹ Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Watauga County, North Carolina, Population and Agriculture Schedules, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (Microfilm of Manuscript Records at the Greensboro Public Library and the North Carolina State Archives); "George Henry Blair," OneWorldTree, www.ancestry.com, accessed on August 13, 2007.

³⁰ "George Henry Blair," OneWorldTree, ancestry.com, accessed on August 13, 2007; "Henry Blair," OneWorldTree, www.ancestry.com, accessed on August 13, 2007; "Florence Blair Ballew: Art Student at Davenport College," *Lenoir News-Topic*, August 4, 1886; "Henry Blair," *Lenoir Topic*, November 11, 1891.

³¹ Vernon S. Stroupe, Tony L. Crumbley, Ruth Y. Wetmore, and Richard W. Winter, ed., *Post Offices and Postmasters of North Carolina: Colonial to USPS, Volume III, Onslow through Yancey* (Charlotte, NC: North Carolina Postal History Society, 1996), 340.

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\$14.02 for a load of cabbage. On November 1, 1892, he purchased thread, hats, an umbrella, axle grease, and a wagon for \$72.50 at Miller Brothers. Bank statements, account books, and promissory notes from this period reveal that George's farming endeavors were successful enough that he was able to lend money to his friends and neighbors on a regular basis.³²

Census records indicate that much of Watauga County's rural population at the close of the nineteenth century was engaged in farming activities. Watauga County farmers grew buckwheat, wheat, oats, rye, corn, potatoes, sorghum cane, tobacco, beans, and peas on 2,170 farms averaging 96.1 acres in size. Many farmers also raised dairy cattle and chickens and harvested honey and wax from bees. Most farmsteads had a vegetable garden, fruit trees, and berry bushes for the use of the family.³³

During the first decades of the twentieth century the average North Carolina farm size dropped but productivity increased in response to advances in farm machinery, soil conservation, crop rotation, pest control, and fertilizer availability. Regional publications such as *The Progressive Farmer*, started in 1886 by Leonidas L. Polk, provided support and advice for southern farmers. Progressive farming introduced new crops, led to debates over agricultural practices, and sparked conversations among farmers regarding the best methods for selecting and caring for poultry and livestock.³⁴

In 1900, the Blair household consisted of George, his wife Mary, and their four children. George and his eldest son Charlie were enumerated as farm owners; the two teenage boys, J. R. and Neal, were listed as farm laborers. According to family tradition, George sold and delivered farm products throughout southwestern North Carolina and northern South Carolina. Neal remembered that his father would take "wagonloads of cabbage, potatoes, apples, chestnut, dried fruit, dried beef, hams and pork to Hickory, Morganton, Statesville, Charlotte, Gastonia and Chester, South Carolina."³⁵

³² Blair family papers in the possession of Sharon Blair Tolbert and Sarah Lynn Blair Spencer.

³³ William R. Merriam, *Census Reports, Volume V, Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900, Agriculture Part I, Farms, Livestock and Animal Products* (Washington: United States Census Office, 1902), 110, 291, 614, 657; William R. Merriam, *Census Reports, Volume V, Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900, Agriculture Part II, Crops and Irrigation* (Washington: United States Census Office, 1902), 177, 254, 385, 488, 566, 736.

³⁴ William S. Powell, *North Carolina through Four Centuries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 425.

³⁵ Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Watauga County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (Microfilm of Manuscript Records at the Greensboro Public Library); Harvey Dinkins, Farm Forum, "Watauga Farming Across the Years," *Winston-Salem Journal*, 1949.

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The 1900 census also reported that the younger children—J. R., Neal, and Florence—had attended school for several years.³⁶ Neal went on to enroll at UNC-Chapel Hill from 1908 to 1910, and Florence was an art major at the Methodist-run Davenport College, a small women's campus in Lenoir, from 1906 to 1911.³⁷ Florence later became a professional painter. Some of her earliest work may be visible at the Blair House, as, according to family tradition, she may have assisted the itinerant painter who decorated the interior walls and ceilings around the turn of the twentieth century.³⁸

J. R. and Neal took over the farm management in 1908.³⁹ The household composition remained the same in 1910, but life on Blair Farm changed dramatically over the next decade. J. R. married Anne Gordon Shearer on April 30, 1913, and the couple eventually moved to Thomasville, where J. R. was a Thomasville Furniture Company executive. Florence wed Lenoir pharmacist James Gordon Ballew on September 30, 1914, and the couple resided in Lenoir. Neal married Mattie (Martha) Lee Sligh on June 30, 1914, and she gave birth to a daughter, Martha Carolyn, on May 20, 1915. Neal and Martha purchased J. R. and Florence's shares of the family farm, paying them installments through the early 1940s. A May 1, 1915 tax list on George's letterhead, which has the heading "Produce and Western NC Hay, Hand-made Kraut a Specialty," indicates that he owned 202 acres valued at \$38; provisions other than hay worth \$280; farming tools and shop machinery valued at \$100; wagons, buggies, and harnesses worth \$170; jewelry, watches, etc. valued at \$50; and 5 horses, 1 jack, 3 cows, 1 steer, 4 yearlings, 1 young calf, 21 sheep, 23 lambs, and 4 pigs. George passed away on January 26, 1916, and Mary soon followed on October 29. Neal and Martha's son Henry Neal Jr. was born on June 10, 1918.⁴⁰

³⁶ Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Watauga County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (Microfilm of Manuscript Records at the Greensboro Public Library).

³⁷ David Lindsey Grant, *Alumni History of the University of North Carolina* (Durham: Christian and King Print Company, 1924), 54. Henry Neal Blair did not graduate from UNC-Chapel Hill, but is considered a member of the class of 1912. Davenport College closed in 1937 and transferred its assets to Brevard College, a fellow Methodist institution still operating in Transylvania County. "Bibliography of Materials about the History of Brevard College," an online bibliography accessed on May 15, 2006, at http://www.brevard.edu/nc_echo/bibliography_of_materials.htm.

³⁸ Scott Nicholson, "Blair House clues may solve search for historical artist," *Watauga Democrat*, August 23, 2006.

³⁹ Harvey Dinkins, "Watauga Farming Across the Years."

⁴⁰ Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Watauga County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (Microfilm of Manuscript Records at the Greensboro Public Library); "George Henry Blair," OneWorldTree, www.ancestry.com, accessed on August 13, 2007; Blair family papers in the possession of Sharon Blair Tolbert and Sarah Lynn Blair Spencer; Elizabeth Ann Arledge Jamison, "Past, Present, and Future Generations of the Sligh and Lee Families of South Carolina," unpublished genealogical compilation, 1997, 34, 37; Gene Blair, "Some Descendants of

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Neal was listed as the head of household and farm owner in the 1920 census; his older brother Charlie also resided in the family home and worked on the farm.⁴¹ Neal and Martha's family continued to grow in the 1920s, with the births of Palmer Sligh on July 8, 1922, Mary George on March 26, 1924, and Rebecca Rousseau on September 26, 1925.⁴²

Farming continued to be an important component of Watauga County's economy in the 1920s, but, following a statewide trend, average farm size continued to decline. The majority of Watauga County farmers (601) owned between 20 and 49 acres in 1920, with an additional 577 farmers owning between 50 and 99 acres. Most farms—1,656 out of a total of 2,020—were operated by owners rather than tenants. Farmers produced crops including corn, wheat, oats, barley, rye, hay, potatoes, and vegetables; and raised cattle, pigs, and chickens on 171,935 acres of agricultural land. Watauga County's eighty-nine percent ratio of acreage in farms to overall land area was high for the mountain region.⁴³

Blair Farm was one of the larger farms in Watauga County in the 1920s, encompassing 202 acres in 1925 according to North Carolina Farm Census reports. Neal Blair had been growing cabbage on the farm for years, and built the Watauga Kraut Factory (which later became the North State Canning Company) with John Steele and Frank Miller in 1922.⁴⁴ He facilitated a Cabbage Grower's Co-op Association Agreement, signed by ninety-six farmers in 1923, with the stated intention of selling cabbage "intelligently," and developed a similar cooperative for locally produced cheese. Neal's daughter Mary

James and Mary Colbert Blair," 185-186; Sharon Blair Tolbert, telephone conversations with her mother, Sarah Lynn Rives Spencer, on April 12, 2008 and Mary George Blair Youngblood on April 13, 2008. Neal started calling his wife Mattie Lee Sligh "Martha" after they were married, as there was already a Mattie (Mattie Mae Ballew, Florence Blair Ballew's sister-in-law and first cousin) in the family; Sharon Blair Tolbert, email correspondence with the author, September 5, 2007.

⁴¹ Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920: Watauga County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (Microfilm of Manuscript Records at the Greensboro Public Library).

⁴² Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Watauga County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (Microfilm of Manuscript Records at the Greensboro Public Library); Elizabeth Ann Arledge Jamison, "Past, Present, and Future Generations of the Sligh and Lee Families of South Carolina," 38-40.

⁴³ William Lane Austin, *Census Reports, Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Agriculture Volume 2, The Southern States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932), 363, 379, 397, 405.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 379; North Carolina Department of Agriculture, Statistics Division, *Farm Census Reports*, 1925, Box 33 (Washington-Wayne Counties), North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh; Harvey Dinkins, "Watauga Farming Across the Years," Sharon Blair Tolbert, email correspondence with the author, August 20, 2007.

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George remembers going to help other family members in the cheese factory, which was on the west side of Boone, and bringing home large round wooden boxes of cheese.⁴⁵ In 1925, the Blair family cultivated 55 acres; one tenant also lived on the farm and worked 6.5 acres. The farm produced 13 acres of corn, 7 acres of wheat, 5 acres of rye, 3 acres of hay, 30 acres of other grasses, and 2.5 acres of Irish potatoes. The family devoted 1 acre to a home garden; harvested chestnuts, cherries, and apples from 100 trees; and tended livestock including 1 hog, 40 hens, and 7 dairy cows.⁴⁶

Charlie Blair's health declined in the late 1920s. A local girl, Vanna Miller Stanberry, helped care for him for a short time around 1928. Charlie left his share of the farm to Neal and Martha upon his death on March 8, 1933.⁴⁷

Boone Township contained 452 farms in 1935. The overall Blair farm size increased to 282 acres that year, but the cultivated acreage remained about the same. Neal planted 50 acres; his tenants worked 10 acres. Crop variety diminished, with 5 acres being planted in oats, 20 in other hays, 9 in Irish potatoes, and 12 in other commercial truck crops. The farm orchard contained 30 trees.⁴⁸

By 1945, only 13 farms remained in Boone Township, with the 475-acre Appalachian State Teachers College farm being the largest by far. Most of the other 12 farms were no longer productive. North Carolina Farm Census records classify 4 as "not farmed, no one living there;" 4 as "subdivided into lots and sold;" and 1 as "idle, no crops grown." Only 34 people lived on the township's farms. Farm owners cleared and cultivated 107 acres, tenants worked 15 acres, idle pastures encompassed 249 acres, and 235

⁴⁵ Tolbert, "The Blair Farm, 1835-2004," 10; Sharon Blair Tolbert, email correspondence with the author, August 20, 2007.

⁴⁶ North Carolina Department of Agriculture, Statistics Division, *Farm Census Reports*, 1925, Box 33 (Washington-Wayne Counties), North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh. Although the farm census reports that the Blair farm had pecan trees, Mary George and other area residents stated that the Boone climate was too harsh for pecan trees. Mary George recalls that her family did grow many chestnut, cherry, and apple trees. Sharon Blair Tolbert, telephone conversation with Mary George Blair Youngblood on April 13, 2008;

⁴⁷ Gene Blair, "Some Descendants of James and Mary Colbert Blair," 185; Sharon Blair Tolbert, telephone conversations with her mother, Sarah Lynn Rives Spencer, on April 12, 2008; Mary George Blair Youngblood on April 13, 2008; and Rachel Saunders, Vanna Miller Stanberry's granddaughter, on April 14, 2008.

⁴⁸ North Carolina Department of Agriculture, Statistics Division, *Farm Census Reports*, 1935, Box 83 (Warren-Watauga Counties), North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh; Harvey Dinkins, "Watauga Farming Across the Years."

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acres were wooded. Livestock numbers were also greatly reduced, with only 90 cows and 27 pigs remaining in the township.⁴⁹

Neal Blair's farm was not listed in the 1945 North Carolina Farm Census, but a 1949 *Winston-Salem Journal* article features the property as one of the oldest and most successful farms in Watauga County. Neal was still growing large quantities of cabbage at that time, in addition to some potatoes and onions. The article maintains that he had "revolutionized his marketing procedure," as he sold "everything in the field." Tractor-trailer trucks traveled on gravel roads throughout the farm, picking up produce for delivery in places such as Atlanta, Miami, and Birmingham.⁵⁰ Tenant farmers assisted with farm production and lived in two no-longer-extant houses on the property.⁵¹ Neal's son Palmer, a Boone photographer, married Sarah Lynn Rives on October 25, 1947, and the newlyweds planted and harvested a cabbage crop on Neal's farm in order to generate extra income.⁵²

By the late 1940s, Neal Blair allowed Palmer and Hudson C. Sisk Jr., a pilot and manager of the Morganton-Lenoir airport, to utilize some of his agricultural land as Watauga County's first airfield. Local pilots offered recreational airplane rides on the weekends, and in 1949 the original landing strip was extended to 1,800 feet so that six-passenger planes could land. Sisk stated in a June 30, 1949 *Watauga Democrat* article that "because of Boone's enviable summer climate and its location in the heart of a vacation area, there is no question but that a large amount of air traffic will use the facilities."⁵³

In a tragic twist of fate, thirty-seven-year-old Hudson C. Sisk Jr., and thirty-four-year-old Palmer Blair were killed in a plane crash on March 21, 1957. Appalachian Sulfides commissioned Blair to take aerial photographs of the Ore Knob Copper Mine in Ashe County, and he chartered Sisk's plane for the

⁴⁹ North Carolina Department of Agriculture, Statistics Division, *Farm Census Reports*, 1945, Box 120 (Warren-Watauga Counties), North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh.

⁵⁰ Harvey Dinkins, "Watauga Farming Across the Years."

⁵¹ Tolbert, "The Blair Farm, 1835-2004," 11.

⁵² Sharon Blair Tolbert, telephone conversation with Sarah Lynn Rives Spencer on April 12, 2008.

⁵³ Sharon Blair Tolbert, correspondence with the author, August 31, 2007; "Blair Airport Will Be Improved Says Owner," *Watauga Democrat*, June 30, 1949.

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endeavor. Sisk lost control of his small plane, which stalled as he was making a slow pass at low altitude for Blair's shot, and crashed in an open field. Both men died at the scene.⁵⁴

Palmer had encouraged his father to retain as much of the Blair farm acreage as possible. Soon after Palmer's untimely death, however, Neal began selling land, including the airfield, to developers in order to supplement his meager farm income. The Boone Golf Club, the Moose Lodge, the Blairmont subdivision, and other residences now occupy what were once Blair Farm agricultural fields and livestock pastures.⁵⁵

Neal and Martha Blair continued to operate the farm and reside in the Blair House until 1970, when, due to Neal's declining health, they moved into an apartment in a house owned by Carolyn and Latta Johnson (their daughter and son-in-law), in the Blairmont subdivision. Neal passed away on December 12, 1971. Martha moved out of the apartment and into the Johnson's house, where she lived until her death on June 20, 1985. Martha and extended family used the house occasionally during the summer months until Martha passed away, at which time Neal and Martha's son Henry Neal, Jr. inherited a 9.1-acre portion of the property that included the family home and outbuildings. The Blair House then remained vacant for most of the next nineteen years. Neal and Martha's daughter, Rebecca (Becky) Blair Penwell, occupied the house during the summers of 2000-2002 while sorting through family belongings. Becky passed way in January 2003. In September 2004 Byron Tolbert and his wife Sharon Rousseau Blair Tolbert secured the property with the assistance of realtor/developers Graydon Eggers and Phil Templeton and an investor, who purchased the house and acreage from Henry Neal Blair Jr.'s estate and held it for the Tolberts until they were able to purchase the property outright in September 2005. The Tolberts are currently restoring the Blair House and outbuildings and began growing organic produce in spring 2008.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ "Palmer Blair Dies in Crash of Plane, Lenoir Man Also Killed in Accident," *Watauga Democrat*, March 28, 1957; "Two Men Die In Plane Crash In Ashe County," *The Charlotte Observer*, March 22, 1957; Al Perry, "Aerial Photo Trip Ends in Disaster for Two Men," *Winston-Salem Journal*, March 22, 1957; "Palmer Blair is Victim of Plane Crash on Thursday," *The Appalachian*, March 28, 1957; Sharon Blair Tolbert, telephone conversation with Sarah Lynn Rives Spencer on April 12, 2008.

⁵⁵ Ibid.; Kathleen McFadden, "Blair Farm: Historic Treasure at the Bend of the Road," *The Mountain Times*, August 21, 2003.

⁵⁶ Tolbert, "The Blair Farm, 1835-2004," 9; Sharon Blair Tolbert, email correspondence and telephone conversations with the author, September 14, 2007, and April 21, 2008, and telephone conversation with Sarah Lynn Rives Spencer on April 12, 2008.

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Architecture Context

In his 2003 survey report, “Historic and Architectural Resources of Watauga County, North Carolina, ca. 1763-1952,” Tony Van Winkle noted that intact Watauga County farms are a rarity due to rapid population growth, increased costs of living, development pressure, and tourism. Many farmhouses have lost their associated outbuildings and agricultural landscapes; others have been altered through conversion into vacation houses or bed and breakfast inns.⁵⁷ Blair Farm is one of only a few nineteenth-century Watauga County farms with an intact primary residence and outbuildings. Other mid-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century farmhouses and complexes include Mast Farm, Baird Farm, Greene Farm, Lee Carender Farm, and the Josie and Gaither Critcher House.

Blair Farm

The Blairs, like most of their neighbors, relied on the livestock and poultry they raised, the crops they grew, and the commodities they produced to provide an annual income for their families. The layout of the Blair Farm complex thus reflects the efficiency of the diversified, progressive farm. The extant outbuildings on Blair Farm—a log smokehouse, a frame granary/wood shed, and a frame carriage house—were built in the vernacular tradition of western North Carolina farm buildings, utilizing readily available materials and basic framing techniques. Outbuildings associated with the domestic sphere were closest to the family dwelling, while buildings associated with crop, livestock, and poultry production were farther away. The back porch of the house served as convenient and sheltered work space. Water from the spring flowed into a race that ran through the springhouse/storage room at the rear ell’s north end and then out through a pipe into a horse trough, which emptied into the creek, or “branch.” The smokehouse, used to preserve and store pork, was adjacent to the house to protect its contents from animals and facilitate monitoring during the curing process. The outhouses were situated outside the immediate rear yard area for privacy and hygiene, but close enough for the family to access easily. The Blairs added a modern bathroom to the house in the 1930s, but undoubtedly continued to use the outhouses when working on the farm.

The granary/woodshed was located near the house and the barn to allow the family easy access to fuel, market products, and livestock feed. Remnants of the corn crib at the building’s southwest corner include a portion of a wall with openings to provide air circulation for the stored corncobs. Grain was stored in fully-sided bins lining the side walls of the upper floor in order to protect it from rodents and insects. The

⁵⁷ Tony VanWinkle, “Historic and Architectural Resources of Watauga County, North Carolina, ca. 1763-1952,” 82-83.

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tool shed on the granary/woodshed's west elevation provided convenient work space in close proximity to the house and other outbuildings. Farm machinery, carriages, and later automobiles were housed and serviced in the carriage house, located west of the house and granary/woodshed, while the large tractors, plows, and harvesting machines were stored closer to the agricultural fields.

Other Watauga County Farms

Mast Farm (NR 1972), situated on Broadstone Road east of its junction with N. C. Highway 194 in the Valle Crucis vicinity, is one of the "most complete and best-preserved" nineteenth century farms in western North Carolina. The complex, which encompasses a series of Mast family houses and outbuildings, now serves as a bed and breakfast inn. David and Mary Shull Mast built the first dwelling, a two-story log house, on the property around 1812; their son Andrew and his wife Caroline moved the log building to allow for the construction of their large frame residence around 1885. David and Mary's son David Finley and his wife Josephine also built a house on the farm, and Josephine, who became a leader in the regional crafts revival during the early twentieth century, used the Mast log house as a weaving studio. Extant outbuildings include a springhouse, meathouse, blacksmith shop, octagonal gazebo, and a large gambrel-roofed frame barn with vented cupolas. Like Blair Farm, Mast Farm reflects adaptation and change in agricultural practices over many generations of family ownership.⁵⁸

The seat of the late-nineteenth-century Baird Farm, sited on N. C. Highway 194 west of its junction with Broadstone Road and Mast Farm, is a frame I-house with a double-tier front porch, picturesque trim, and a two-story rear ell. According to family tradition, the house's stylish main block was built around an earlier log dwelling, reflecting the common practice—also seen in the Blair House—of expanding an existing residence to meet changing needs and incorporate newly popular architectural styles. The frame outbuilding complex includes a large clipped-front-gable-roofed barn with an unusual cantilevered second story that creates a sheltered area for farm equipment below.⁵⁹

Greene Farm, located on N. C. Highway 194 south of Meat Camp Road in the Boone vicinity, is another example of a prosperous bottomland farm with a two-story frame farmhouse and frame outbuildings. The Greene's constructed the original portion of the dwelling around 1875 and added onto the house in the

⁵⁸ Catherine W. Bishir, Michael T. Southern, and Jennifer F. Martin, *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 218-219.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 219; Mattson, Alexander, and Associates, Inc., *Historic Architectural Resources Survey and Report, Replace Bridge Nos. 49 and 50 over Middle Fork and East Fork of New River, Boone, Watauga County, TIP No. B-3066*, March 15, 2000, 10.

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early twentieth century, resulting in an asymmetrical façade with a central front-gable section flanked by two wings. Sawntwork ornament embellishes the one-story wraparound porch and covered balconies. Two gambrel-roofed barns stand to the east of the house.⁶⁰

The Lee Carender Farm, situated on N. C. Highway 194 just southwest of its junction with Rominger Road, is, like Blair Farm, a medium-sized farm complex owned by descendants of the original builders. The property includes a vernacular, two-story, L-plan, 1910 house with a spindle-work porch railing; a one-room, frame, ca. 1890s dwelling; a ca. 1890s frame kitchen; and a series of 1930s outbuildings—a gambrel-roofed barn, three frame sheds, a frame chicken house, a two-level cellar, and a frame privy. According to current owners Lavola and Launa Carender, Works Progress Administration workers constructed the privy entirely of chestnut.⁶¹

The circa 1910 Josie and Gaither Critcher House, located on Bamboo Road west of its junction with Brown's Chapel Road in the Bamboo vicinity, is one of only a few rural Watauga County farmhouses displaying Queen Anne-style design influence. The imbricated gable projecting from the center of the high hip roof, a small corner tower, and the wraparound porch are, like the decoratively-shingled Blair House front gable and dormers, vernacular interpretations of the nationally popular Queen Anne style. Although the Critcher House was once the center of a farm complex, no outbuildings associated with the property survive.⁶²

These Watauga County farms are particularly good examples of a property type that was once dominant in the county and is slowly disappearing from the landscape. In many cases, properties like Blair Farm have been abandoned as families turn to other ways of life. The survivors are increasingly significant representatives of an important, but vanishing, period of Watauga County history.

Decorative Painting Context

Architectural Historian Laura A. W. Phillips conducted a study of North Carolina's decorative interior painting in the late 1980s, identifying a broad range of forms, styles, and techniques executed by

⁶⁰ Ibid., 222.

⁶¹ Tony Van Winkle, "Lee Carender Farm," Survey entry on file at the Western Office of Archives and History, Asheville.

⁶² Tony Van Winkle, "Josie and Gaither Critcher House," Survey entry on file at the Western Office of Archives and History, Asheville.

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professionally-trained and self-taught painters in approximately four hundred buildings across the state. The heaviest concentration of decorative painting she discovered was in the north-central Piedmont, particularly in counties near the Virginia border. Phillips found that some decorative painters were itinerant artists who traveled throughout North Carolina and the southeast, while others practiced their trade only in the communities in which they lived. Their clientele also varied—owners of grand homes and modest dwellings alike were able to commission decorative painting, as traveling artists often worked for room and board in lieu of monetary compensation.⁶³

Popular decorative painting techniques included imitative wood graining, which appeared primarily on doors, but was sometimes also seen on wainscoting, mantels, and other architectural elements that might have been rendered in distinctive woods such as mahogany, bird's eye maple, tiger maple, and oak. Mary George Blair Youngblood remembers that the Blair House doors and some other surfaces were painted in this manner, but the application of oil-based paint on the doors and trim throughout the house makes it difficult to confirm the manner and extent of the graining. Similarly, the baseboards, which are also covered with oil-based paint, may have been painted to emulate stone. This technique, known as marbling, was “frequently used in conjunction with graining in a more comprehensive, well-integrated approach to interior painted decoration.”⁶⁴

Phillips found that stone blocking, a marbling subcategory, was exceedingly rare in decoratively painted North Carolina interiors. She identified only thirteen extant examples, several of which had been covered with later finishes or were in poor condition. This technique, which was related to the popularity of ashlar-patterned wallpapers, was frequently used in more formal spaces, such as hallways, parlors, and dining rooms. Most stone blocking imitated marble, but granite was another possibility, as seen in the center passage of the mid-nineteenth-century James A. Johnson House in Harnett County, which is painted with dark gray granite blocks with white and other marble accents. The Flinchum House in rural Surry County exhibits a much more vernacular interpretation of this technique in its parlor, with large yellow ashlar blocks containing bold marble veining.⁶⁵ The rarity of stone blocking in painted North Carolina interiors makes the discovery of the Blair House dining room paint scheme—where the itinerant artist painted the lower two-thirds of each wall light brownish-gold with deep blue-green-outlined blocks

⁶³ Laura A. W. Phillips, “Grand Illusions: Decorative Interior Painting in North Carolina,” in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, IV*, ed. Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 156-157.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 157-158; Sharon Blair Tolbert, email correspondence with the author, September 5, 2007

⁶⁵ Phillips, “Grand Illusions: Decorative Interior Painting in North Carolina,” 155, 158.

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and veins to emulate stone—extremely significant. The execution, like that of the Flinchum House, is more whimsical than sophisticated, drawn from the artist’s inspiration rather than a pattern book. The availability of paint pigments may have dictated the unusual color combination used on the Blair House dining room walls.

Phillips characterizes the smoked ceiling, achieved when painters waved “a lighted torch, pine knot, or kerosene lamp across wet paint so that the smoke created a marbled effect on the paint surface,” as yet another marbling subcategory. She notes that although this technique “was relatively easy to achieve,” only eight examples—six of which are located in Stokes, Surry, Yadkin, and Wilkes Counties—have been recorded in North Carolina.⁶⁶ The discovery of the four smoked quadrants on the Blair House’s center room ceiling and the smoked dining room ceiling is therefore quite important. Neal Blair told his children that the painter used a “short lamp” with the “chimney taken off” to smoke the ceiling.⁶⁷

The majority of the Blair House’s decorative painting is a combination of stenciling and freehand work. Most of the parlor’s ceiling design—a center medallion with four radiating paths that extend to an outer border, dividing the ceiling into four quadrants—is stenciled, but some elements are painted freehand. The outer border and radiating paths have bright blue fields with black borders and gold crescent and diamond stenciling along the edges. Freehand black outlines emphasize the top two edges of each diamond, and two freehand gold dots extend from each diamond’s point. The blue band around the center medallion continues this motif along its outer edge. The inner edge ornamentation—a gold stenciled stylized filigree motif accented with black infill at regular intervals—is also embellished with two gold freehand dots at each projection. The center medallion, outlined in black, consists of a green field; a ring of red, yellow, and light green trompe l’oeil panels; a band of freehand gold flowers and black vines; and a bright blue circle outlined in black with a central red and yellow compass rose.

The parlor’s walls are not as elaborately finished as the ceiling. The painter used an extended version of the gold stenciled stylized filigree motif around the ceiling’s central medallion to embellish the tall frieze, which has a red field above a black border. Gold balls hang from each projection, replacing the two freehand dots used elsewhere.

The west room wall paint scheme consists of a brown field and a gold stenciled stylized filigree motif frieze. Portions of the filigree motif are accented with black infill. Painted gold pendants, which resemble acorns, hang from each projection, followed by two gold freehand dots. The ceiling’s green

⁶⁶ Ibid., 158.

⁶⁷ Sharon Blair Tolbert, telephone conversation with Mary George Blair Youngblood, April 11, 2008.

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center is outlined with double black lines; the outer band is greenish-gold, with a red stylized stenciled motif extending along the edges. Two black freehand dots punctuate each projection.

The painter used the crescent and diamond stencil in three bedrooms, with a variety of color schemes. The east room has green walls with a red crescent and diamond pattern stenciled around the cornice and the ceiling's outer edge. Two red freehand dots extend from each diamond's point. The two bedrooms on the enclosed rear porch are more simply finished, with the crescent and diamond pattern stenciled in dark green on a yellow field around the cornice of one room, and dark green on a light green field in the other. Two green freehand dots extend from each diamond's point.

Although commercially-produced stencils were available through trade catalogs at this time, Blair family members recall that the painter cut his own stencils, a fact of particular interest as the ceiling and frieze painting bears a striking resemblance to decorative painting in six other buildings. Laura Phillips documented three North Carolina dwellings—the Rucker-Eaves House in Rutherfordton, the Edwards-Maxwell House in Alleghany County, and a rural Chatham County house—that display similar design elements; as well as Damascus Church in Lumpkin, Georgia; and the Calhoun-Perry House in east Texas. Cobb Landmarks and Historical Society curator Maryellen Higginbotham of Marietta, Georgia, who is familiar with Phillips' work, became aware of almost identical painting in the Chesser-Williams House in Gwinnett County, Georgia, surveyed by local students in 2006. These buildings were constructed from circa 1870 to circa 1900, and it is therefore possible that the same traveling artist executed all of the work in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century. Attempts to discover identical stencils in period trade catalogs have been unsuccessful, which supports the theory that the stencils were hand cut, but as the itinerant artist's name and background remains unknown, research is inconclusive.⁶⁸

The Blair House overmantel and dining room frieze murals are very distinctive, yet certain details, such as use of log and crenellated stone buildings, and the overall composition—a trompe l'oeil arch framing the scene and the placement of water and land features are in keeping with the Calhoun-Perry House overmantel.⁶⁹ In the case of the Blair House paintings, the simplistically rendered mountain scenes—perhaps representing Blair Farm—and the unusual coastal scenes are likely images specifically requested by the Blairs in combination with the artist's stock painting material. The significance of the Blair House murals lies not only in the family association, however, but in the rarity of surviving scenic painting in

⁶⁸ Ibid., 159; Laura A. W. Phillips, "Rutherfordton House Plays Role in Painting Mystery," *North Carolina Preservation*, Number 75, Spring/Summer 1989, 17; Laura A. W. Phillips and Maryellen Higginbotham, meeting with the author, October 12, 2006.

⁶⁹ Laura A. W. Phillips, telephone conversation with the author, August 24, 2007.

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North Carolina. Laura Phillips documented only twenty-four examples, over a third of which were murals painted by Works Progress Administration artists in post offices. The parlor of the Reich-Strupe-Butner House in Forsyth County contains scenic painting in the same genre as that in the Blair House. Marble-blocked walls frame two trompe l'oeil windows with romantic landscape views of a farm scene and a gristmill and pond.⁷⁰

The discovery of the Blair House decorative interior painting adds an important component to the understanding of such work in North Carolina around the turn of the twentieth century. Although wallpaper was fairly inexpensive and readily available during this period, even in rural Watauga County, the Blairs chose to have six rooms on the first floor of their house elaborately painted, resulting in “one of the most extensive uses of decorative painting in Western North Carolina.”⁷¹ The fact that the Blairs—hardworking farmers who resided in a modest house—could afford and were interested in such decorative painting makes a significant statement about the enduring popularity and availability of this type of interior finish.

⁷⁰ Laura A. W. Phillips, “Grand Illusions: Decorative Interior Painting in North Carolina,” 159-160.

⁷¹ Laura A. W. Phillips, telephone conversation with the author, August 24, 2007.

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10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property consists of Watauga County tax parcel # 2910-83-5152-000 (9.1 acres), as indicated by the heavy solid line on the enclosed tax map.

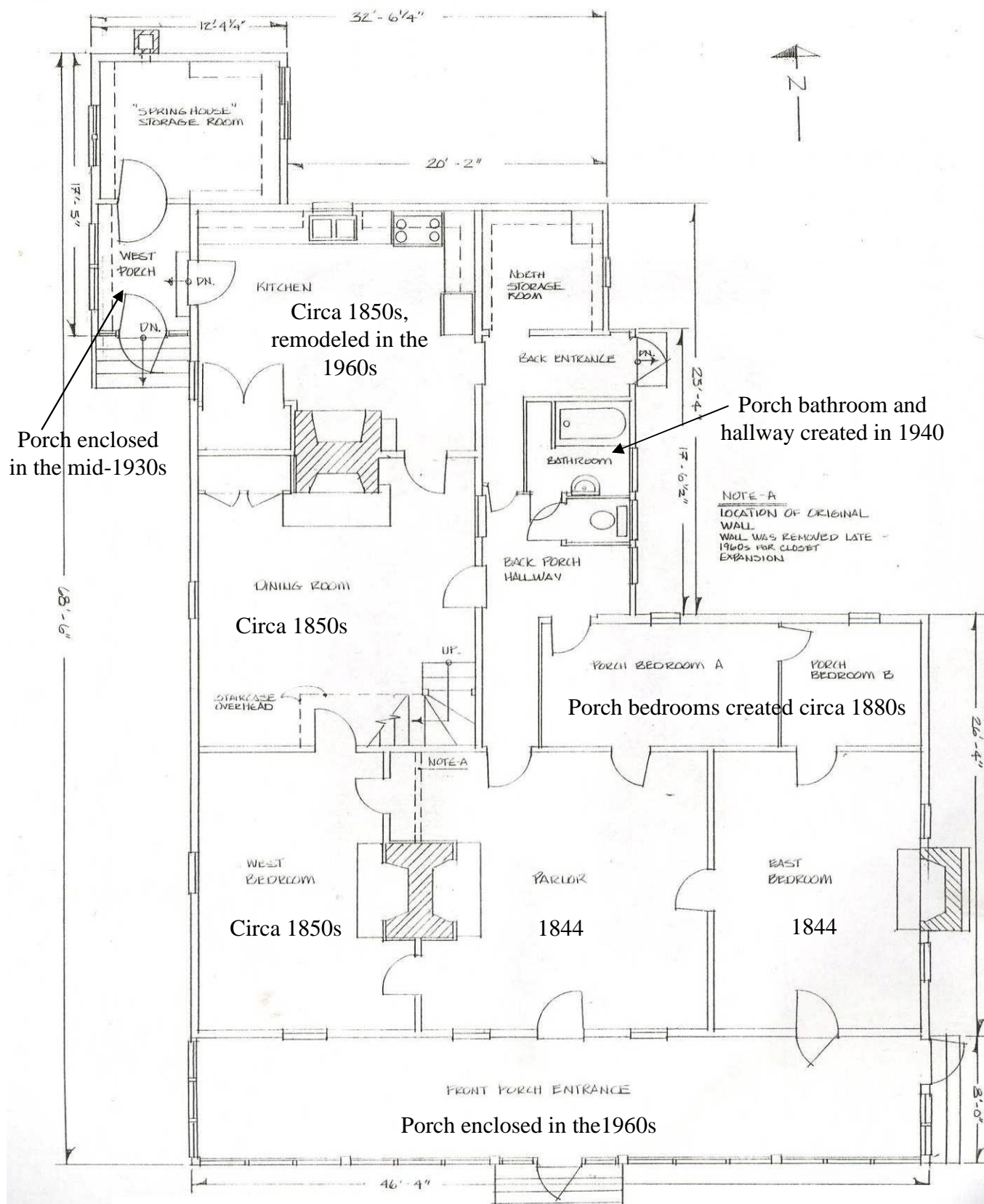
Boundary Justification

The nominated tract is the original site of the Blair House and outbuildings and includes the residual acreage associated with Blair Farm.

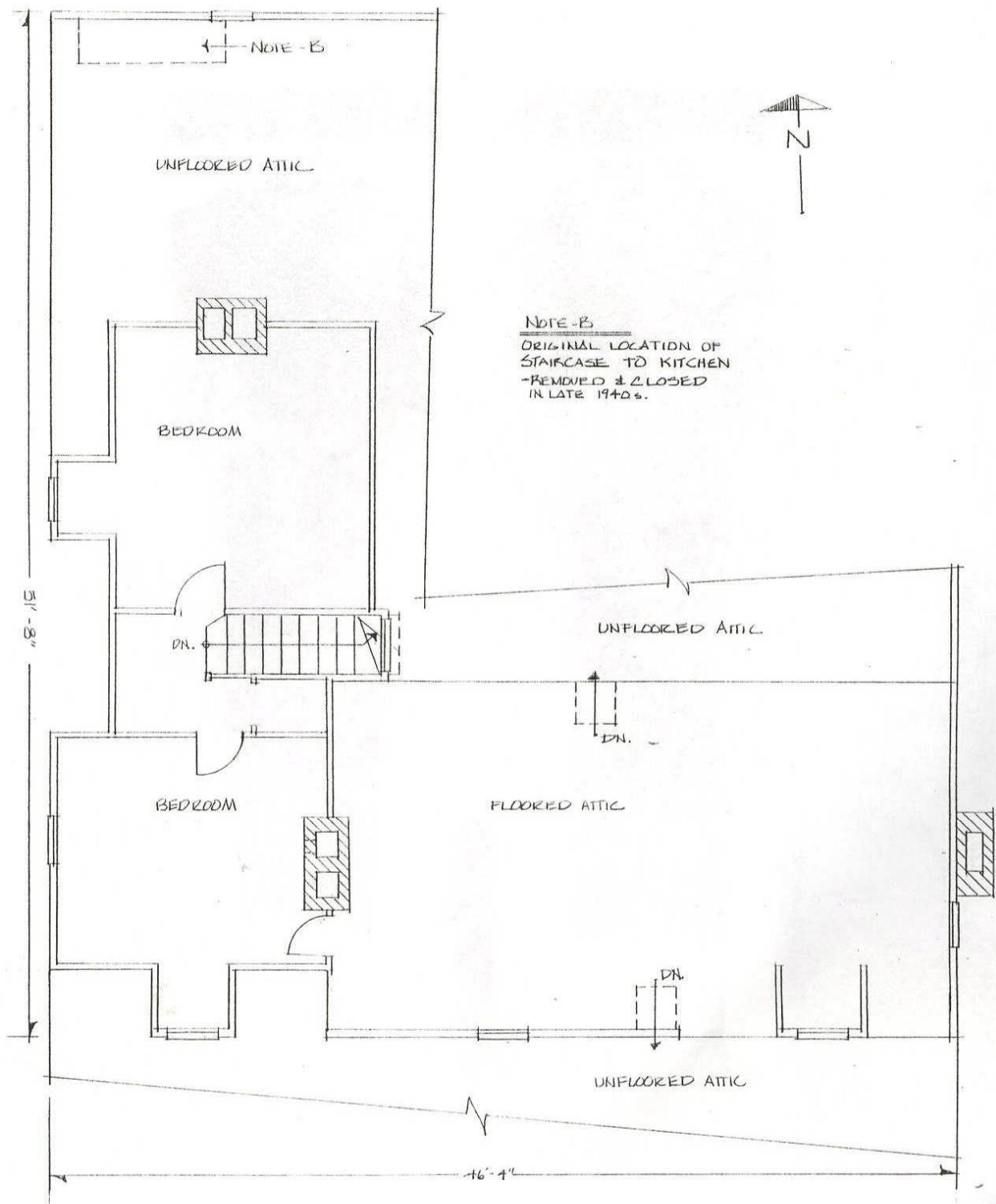
Photo Catalog

Photographs by Heather Fearnbach, Edwards-Pitman Environmental, 3334 Nottingham Road, Winston-Salem, NC, in July and November 2006 and September 2007. Digital images located at the North Carolina SHPO.

1. Blair House, façade, looking north
2. Blair House, east elevation, looking southwest
3. Blair House, west elevation, looking southeast
4. Blair House, parlor, west elevation
5. Blair House, parlor, ceiling medallion
6. Blair House, dining room, southwest corner, stone-blocked walls and trompe l'oeil-panel frieze
7. Blair House, west room, southeast corner, frieze and ceiling
8. Blair Farm, smokehouse, southeast oblique
9. Blair Farm, granary/woodshed, southwest oblique
10. Blair Farm, setting and carriage house, looking northwest from front lawn



Blair House First Floor Plan
Deerfield Road, Boone
Watauga County, North Carolina
Plan drawn by Sharon Blair Tolbert



Blair House Second Floor Plan
Deerfield Road, Boone
Watauga County, North Carolina
Plan drawn by Sharon Blair Tolbert